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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000203

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [MASS](#) [PBTS](#) [DJ](#) [ER](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI/France - Public Spat over GOF Reliability as Ally

REF: 10 DJIBOUTI 125

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

1.(C/NF) Summary: A Djiboutian Foreign Ministry publication has accused France of "playing an extremely negative role detrimental to the vital interests of the Republic of Djibouti" in regard to its border dispute with Eritrea. The French Embassy issued a two-page letter to rebut this charge, and planned to convoke the Djiboutian Ambassador in Paris over the matter. Djiboutian officials have long privately grumbled at what they see as weak French military and diplomatic efforts on behalf of the GODJ against Eritrea. But this public criticism of the former colonial power is highly unusual and underscores the depth of Djiboutian feelings on this issue. End summary.

MFA Publication Lauds U.S., Blasts France

2.(U) In mid-February, the Djiboutian MFA distributed a 79-page Foreign Ministry Publication, dated December 2009 and entitled "Sovereignty of Djibouti over Ras Doumeira and the Island of Doumeira: Well-Founded Facts." Available in Arabic, English, and French, the booklet is mostly a straightforward recounting of the chronology of the military situation and diplomatic efforts related to the Eritrea's military incursion at the Djibouti/Eritrea border at Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Island. The publication includes aerial photographs of the area, as well as basic background documents, including copies of the original French and Ethiopian boundary agreements, relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, etc.

3.(U) The final pages of the publication, however, include a section entitled "Support to the Republic of Djibouti." After commenting on solidarity with Djibouti from other regional and African states, the MFA booklet includes three paragraphs about the U.S. and France, as follows:

"We would miss the basic rules of recognition if we overlook the positive and constructive role played by the United States of America during the different phases of this painful crisis, which is still ongoing. As such, the Government and people of Djibouti are immensely grateful to the United States.

"For the record, and given the duty to inform the people of

Djibouti and international public opinion, it is important for us to affirm powerfully and persuasively that France has, since the beginning of this crisis, played an extremely negative role detrimental to the vital interests of the Republic of Djibouti in Ras Doumeira and Doumeira Island.

"This unintelligible attitude of France, historical ally and allegedly unwavering supporter of the Republic of Djibouti in such circumstances, has profoundly disappointed the government and people of Djibouti and risks to permanently affect the common interests of the two countries."

French Embassy Responds, Asks for Retraction

4.(SBU) In a February 18 diplomatic note to the MFA, copied to all missions in Djibouti, the French Embassy fired back, noting its support for Djibouti in a variety of ways, including:

-aerial surveillance and intelligence-sharing on the

DJIBOUTI 00000203 002 OF 003

Djibouti/Eritrea border;

-provision of historical records from the French archives documenting boundary lines;

-convocation of the Eritrean Ambassador in France on 25 April 2008;

-a visit to the border by the French Forces Commander in Djibouti on 14 May 2008;

-a visit to the border by General Puga, French Chief of Operations on 1 June 2008;

-deployment of French forces to the border area as of 14 June 2008 (note: this is after the clash between Djibouti and Eritrea on 10 June 2008);

-medical support for Djiboutian military evacuees following the Djibouti/Eritrea clash of 10 June 2008;

-diplomatic support, including French votes for UNSCRs 1862 and 1907; and

-a reminder by visiting French President Sarkozy on 19 January 2010 that France had condemned the Eritrean aggression at Doumeira (see also Ref A regarding the Sarkozy visit).

5.(SBU) The French diplomatic note concludes with a request that the MFA make the "necessary corrections" to the record, and "regrets that the positions and actions of France have not been correctly reflected or recognized as they should be in the document published by the Djiboutian government."

Djiboutian Publication was Minister-Level Decision

6.(C/NF) Asked privately about the exchange, French Ambassador Dominique Decherf told Ambassador 18 February that the French had

been aware of the planned publication since late December. Decherf said the offending passages had been written at a time when the Djiboutians were particularly irked over what they saw as GOF foot-dragging on adoption of a UNSCR to sanction Eritrea (eventually, UNSCR 1907). The French thought this matter had been resolved following their vote in favor of the resolution, and President's Sarkozy's discussion with Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh and public statements of French support for the UNSCR. Decherf said Djiboutian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Ali Youssef had explained subsequent publication of the booklet with the poor excuse that it had already been printed and the GODJ wanted to ensure its position on the border dispute received wide play. Youssef defended this decision in an hour-long telephone conversation with Decherf after the booklet was distributed, according to the French Ambassador.

French MFA to Convoke Djiboutian Ambassador in Paris

7.(C/NF) Decherf said this matter had received sufficient attention in Paris that the Foreign Ministry would convoke Djiboutian Ambassador Rachad Farah to register its displeasure with the content of the booklet.

Comment

DJIBOUTI 00000203 003 OF 003

8.(C/NF) The MFA publication merely reveals publicly what Djiboutian officials have been saying privately almost since the start of the border dispute with Eritrea: that the GOF military responded only after the fighting had stopped and that French diplomacy delayed and at various times weakened Security Council action. It is highly unusual that the Djiboutians were so open in their criticism of the French, but this reflects the GODJ's very real disappointment over the performance of their closest historical ally on a central national security issue for Djibouti.
SWAN